

STUDIES ON LEOPARDI

J. Van Horne.

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STUDIES ON LEOPARDI

- I. The Attitude of Leopardi Toward Romanticism
- II. Giacomo Leopardi and Classical Antiquity

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STUDIES ON LEOPARDI

I

THE ATTITUDE OF LEOPARDI TOWARD ROMANTICISM

It is only in the last few years that the publication of the papers left by Leopardi in the hands of his friend Antonio Ranieri has cleared up many matters that were formerly very uncertain. The most important of these recently published works is the vast collection of notes called by their author the "Zibaldone" and printed under the title of "Pensieri di Varia Filosofia e di Bella Letteratura."¹ It includes an immense number of reflections on various subjects such as philology, grammar, literature, art, style, history, philosophy, and so on. It is the rough material for a number of most important works, some few of which are found among the approved prose and poetry of Leopardi. By far the greater portion of these notes remained in the condition in which they are found in the "Zibaldone," because their author was never physically strong enough to undertake the labor of collecting them and adding to them.

Other compositions of Leopardi, also left in the hands of Ranieri at Naples after the poet's death, have been published in a volume called "Scritti Vari Inediti di Giacomo Leopardi dalle Carte Napoletane." Among these various productions, the "Discorso di un Italiano intorno alla Poesia Romantica" is of peculiar value in the consideration of Leopardi's attitude to-

¹ Published by Successori Le Monnier, Firenze, 1898-1907.

ward romanticism as understood by him. An analysis of it will be given presently.

Many attempts have been made to explain the failure of romanticism to gain a firm foothold in Italy. In the dearth of better examples Leopardi is often cited as an exponent of this movement, so popular in other countries. This statement is always made with distinct reservations, and the conclusion is generally reached that Leopardi was a severe classicist in form, but was influenced by many elements contributing to the romantic outbreak. Much has been said in support of both contentions, and examination of the "Canti" and of the "Prose Morali" would seem to disclose a reasonable basis for both views.

The "Zibaldone" and other miscellaneous writings shed a great deal of light upon Leopardi's attitude. Although the major portion of what he writes is distinctly inimical to romanticism, it is quite often the case that he shows leanings and desires that may well be called romantic. Strongly influenced by his reading of French philosophical writers, by his own natural inclinations and by his bodily suffering, he devotes page after page of his notes to a glorification, in fact to a deification of nature and of the primitive stages of human history. His whole being is in revolt against the conditions that surround him. He builds up a system of philosophy that has as one of its elements the unavoidable misery of man in the condition of civilization and in the presence of truth.

Turning to other documents, we find among Leopardi's suppressed productions a number of efforts characterized by romanticism. Among these is the "Diario d'Amore," written in 1819 at the age of nineteen years, an unfinished and extravagant conception based upon a sudden and violent fancy of the poet for his cousin Geltrude Cassi.² Two *canzoni* found among the Neapolitan papers also bear testimony to his romantic leanings.³

Clear as many of these indications of romantic feeling are, they are overshadowed by the evidence in favor of classical tra-

² See *Scritti Vari Inediti di Giacomo Leopardi dalle carte Napoletane*, Firenze, Successori Le Monnier, 1910, pp. 165-182.

³ 'Per una Donna Malata di Malattia Lunga e Mortale.'

'Nella Morte di una Donna Fatta Trucidare col suo Portato dal Corrutto per Mano ed Arte di un Chirurgo.'

dition. Whenever Leopardi indulged in literary or artistic criticism he left no doubt of the direction in which his preference lay. There are many attacks upon romanticism to be found among the scattered entries of the "Zibaldone," but all are presented together in a prose article written in 1819 and published in 1910 among the "Scritti Vari".⁴ This article is entitled "Discorso di un Italiano intorno alla Poesia Romantica". It was originally intended as an answer to some observations that had appeared in *Lo Spettatore Italiano*. In fact Leopardi first called his article "Intorno alle Osservazioni del Cavaliere Lodovico di Breme sulla Poesia Moderna". Later he decided to change the title of the piece and to withhold it from publication, because others had answered the article in *Lo Spettatore*. Moreover, he did not think that Italians were sufficiently impressed by the observations he was answering to heed a simple refutation of them.

A summary of the contents of this "Discorso" follows:

In theory the romanticists attempt to make poetry metaphysical; to destroy all illusions that spring from the imagination; to appeal to the intellect. They forget that in order to produce its effect poetry must deceive. Not truth but the semblance of truth—fact clothed in beautiful settings—is the object of the poet's art. In the best poetry there should also be a popular appeal. In practice the romanticists do not abide by their theories, but they adopt all sorts of bizarre and out-of-the-way conceptions.

Genuine delight can come only from nature. This is shown by the pleasure derived from the primitive elements in the ancient poets. Modern children share the fanciful illusions of the ancients, peopling the world with beautiful creations. The romanticists are wrong to strive against these natural feelings by an appeal to reason. Reason destroys imagination; as a man grows in intellect his fancy becomes weak. Hence the poet should try not to follow the principles of science, but to release fancy from the bonds of reason.

The romanticists wish to drag poetry from the ancient state of nature to the modern condition of civilization. "Because one of the principal differences between romantic poets and our poets, a difference in which many others are summed up, consists in this: that our poets sing of nature and of the eternal and changeless matters and shapes and things of beauty, in

⁴ *Scritti Vari*, pp. 183-272.

short, of the works of God, while the romanticists treat of civilization, of what is transitory and mutable—of the works of men.”

Three reasons may be assigned for the undeniable popularity of romanticism. First of all, the taste of the reading public is corrupt; future critics will be amazed at the vogue of the romantic poets just as nineteenth century critics wonder at the liking for the absurdities of the *seicento*. The second reason is to be found in many men's lack of feeling, caused partly by nature, partly by civilization; let the English and the Germans write for such readers if they choose. Third and most important of the reasons for the spread of romantic poetry is its novelty; singularity and strangeness are always attractive; hence it is no wonder that the reading public is drawn to the outlandish imitations and conceptions of the romantic movement. The vagaries of the school tend to excite laughter rather than fear.

The poets of the new movement deny that the illusions of the ancient world can be used in the scientific modern age. They forget that the province of poetry is the imagination and not the intellect. Separated as he is from nature, a modern writer must study the ancient poets closely. The wholesale rejection of the stories of antiquity is absurd. By this it is not meant that the old poets must be imitated slavishly or pedantically; they must be studied for the sake of their natural point of view—so hard to attain in modern times. It is the opponents of the classics who are pedantic in their sweeping condemnation of ancient models.

Romanticists hold that sentiment belongs peculiarly to their style of poetry. This pretension is refuted by citations from Homer and Vergil. Vergil is to be considered an excellent por-trayer of the feelings that are called modern. The romanticists by indicating Petrarch as an example of their poetic manner contradict themselves. Their whole position is absurd, because sentiment exists in nature. Expressed by the ancients it is spontaneous; expressed by the moderns it is artificial and over-done. The nineteenth century poets aim at psychological interpretation, at a science of the human mind. But though they know more than the ancients knew about the workings of human thought, they are unable to express their knowledge naturally.

Romantic poetry contains much that is monstrous, little that is moderate or harmonious. It is all sentiment; scorning the stories of ancient mythology, it does not hesitate to adopt artificial foreign imagery. The ancients peopled nature with many beautiful creations; they attributed life to inanimate objects; life is more attractive than death, and with all their theories the romanticists are unable altogether to refrain from the practices of ancient poets.

In imitations of nature the essential element is wonder. Romanticism loses this effect by a too literal picture of nature.

The closing pages of the "Discorso" contain an appeal to the young men of Italy to preserve the glorious artistic traditions of their country. As he feels that Italian literature is closer than that of any other nation to Latin and Greek literature, Leopardi urges all patriotic Italians to unite in resisting the flood of romanticism flowing from the North, which would fain destroy the stronghold of good taste and of classical tradition.

Reading of the entries in the "Zibaldone" for the years 1818 to 1823 shows that Leopardi's enthusiasm for the literature of classical antiquity was not less striking than his depreciation of modern letters. He pays tribute after tribute to Homer and to other great masters of antiquity, to the ancient languages, to ancient style. He proclaims as absurd the idea that only the moderns understand nature and can interpret her moods. He maintains that the writers of ancient times were truer to nature than those of the modern world; that the imitation and interpretation of nature have always been inevitable, and here the ancients may be esteemed to excel the moderns; that Homer and Anacreon represent the true imitation of nature, while the romantic poets often tend toward over-sentimentalism and artificiality. In short Leopardi tells us that it is only through recourse to ancient writings that we can hope to compose in a natural way, and that it is impossible really to equal the great Greek productions. He says: "The eternal sources of the great as well as of the beautiful are the writers, the works of all kinds, the examples, the customs, the feelings of the ancients; and by the ancients every remarkable mind of our times is fed."⁵

In view of Leopardi's expressed abhorrence for romanticism, as he conceived it, it may well be asked why he typifies certain fundamental tendencies that are often, and with some reason, called romantic. The answer to this question is to be found in the fact that he had a very distorted notion of romanticism. At the time when he was forming his ideals of literary composition, and writing his first great poems, he had never left his home in

⁵ *Pensieri di Varia Filosofia, etc.*, I, 402.

Recanati, and had enjoyed very few opportunities of making the acquaintance of literary men.⁶ The library collected by his father was well supplied with classical works, but not nearly so well furnished with the output of modern authors. There is little evidence to show that Leopardi was acquainted with many of the best productions of contemporary literature. Even in later life he was not a great reader of modern works, largely because ill health prevented him from devoting much time to study.

On the other hand, he was only too well acquainted with the works of revolutionary theorizers, who typified what seemed to him worst in the writings of the modern school. We have seen in his "Discorso" how he chose to reply to one such production. He had a horror of display, of eccentricity, and of careless style in literary composition. Conservative by nature, he was alarmed at all efforts to break with classical tradition as far as the fundamental art of poetry is concerned. A good example of his horror of display is to be found in a criticism of Lord Byron, which runs as follows: "The whole of the 'Corsair' of Lord Byron (I speak of the translation, I don't know about the original nor about his other works) is interwoven with dashes, not only between sentence and sentence, but between phrase and phrase, and very often even the phrase itself is divided and the substantive is separated from the adjective by these dashes (he comes very near dividing single words), which say to us at every turn, like the charlatan who shows some beautiful thing: 'Pay attention, notice that this which is coming is a fine piece, observe this epithet, which is notable, linger over this expression, fix your mind on this image, etc.', a thing which is displeasing to the reader."

It may be remarked, by way of comment on the above citation, that Leopardi makes a plea for sobriety and modesty in literary composition. On the other hand, he shows clearly that he is not very conversant with the works of Byron. There is little evidence to show that he knew much about English or German

⁶ He left Recanati for the first time in 1822.

⁷ Cf. *Pensieri di Varia Filosofia et di Bella Litterature*, Vol. I, page 325; for a later and more favorable criticism of Byron, see Vol. V, pp. 214-215.

literature of modern times until long after he had formulated his artistic rules (and of course long after the "Discorso" was written). Even in later life, he does not indicate any very great knowledge of or interest in the best contemporary authors. There are many who are never mentioned in his notes.

We are fortunate in possessing a statement of Leopardi that reveals his lofty conception of the importance of the lyric poem. Equally valuable is the description left by him of his method of writing a poem. These two passages follow, and are quoted in Italian, in order that nothing may be taken away from them by translation.

"La lirica si può chiamare la cima, il colmo, la sommità della poesia, la quale è la sommità del discorso umano."⁸

"The lyric can be called the height, the culmination, the summit of poetry, which is the summit of human speech."

"Io non ho scritto in mia vita se non pochissime e brevi poesie. Nello scriverle non ho mai sequito altro ch'un'ispirazione (o frenesia) sopraggiungendo la quale, in due minuti io formava il disegno e la distribuzione di tutto il componimento. Fatto questo, soglio sempre aspettare che mi torni un altro momento, e tornandomi (che ordinariamente non succede se non di là a qualche mese), mi pongo allora a comporre, ma con tanta lentezza, che non mi è possibile di terminare una poesia, benchè brevissima, in meno di due o tre settimane. Questo è il mio metodo, e se l'ispirazione non mi nasce da sè, più facilmente uscirebbe acqua da un tronco, che un solo verso dal mio cervello. Gli altri possono poetare sempre che vogliono, ma io non ho questa facoltà in nessun modo, e per quanto mi pregaste, sarebbe inutile, non perchè io non volessi compiacervi, ma perchè non potrei."⁹

"I have written in my life only very few and short poems. In writing them I have followed nothing but an inspiration (or frenzy) and when that would come upon me, I would form in two minutes the design and the distribution of the whole composition. When this has been done, I am accustomed always to

⁸ *Pensieri* etc., Vol. I, p. 339 (written in 1820).

⁹ *Epistolario di Giacomo Leopardi*, Vol. I, pp. 496-497. This statement is corroborated by suggestions, outlines and unfinished poems among the *Carte Napoletane*. Written in 1824.

wait until another moment comes to me, and when it does come (which ordinarily happens only some months later), I begin to compose, but with such slowness that it is not possible for me to finish a poem, even though extremely short, in less than two or three weeks. This is my method, and if the inspiration is not born in me of itself, water would sooner come from the trunk of a tree than a single verse from my brain. Others can write poetry whenever they wish, but I have not this faculty at all, and however much you might ask me, it would be useless, not because I should not want to accommodate you, but because I should not be able."

Perhaps the most valuable conclusions to be drawn from the utterances of Leopardi just quoted, are his appreciation of the great importance of poetry, his extreme care in composition, and his originality. If he had been a mere imitator of classical poetry, he would have felt able at any moment to grind out a few lines of respectable verse. His reverence for the sacred nature of the poetic art, and for classical poetry in particular, did not allow him to descend to such a practice. Throughout his life he never failed to recommend the most painstaking thoroughness in literary composition.¹⁰

The poems of Leopardi have been classified by Carducci in a manner so satisfactory that it would be futile to endeavor to make any improvements.¹¹ According to this classification there are two main divisions of Leopardi's poetic output. The first extends from 1816 to 1826, that is to say from the "Appressamento della Morte" to the "Epistola a Carlo Pepoli." It embraces the period of Leopardi's principal mental struggles and uncertainty; and is accompanied by constant progress in art. The second division extends from the "Risorgimento" (1828) to the author's death in 1837, embodying the period of perfection in art and of the dominion of pessimism.

The first division of poems includes the Elegiac pieces (1816-1818), the patriotic *canzoni* (1818 and January, 1820), the idyllic poems, the classic *canzoni* (1821-1823), and the "Epis-

¹⁰ Cf. the curious little poem beginning, "Quando fanciullo io venni" (written in 1828).

¹¹ Cf. Carducci, *Degli Spiriti e delle Forme nella Poesia di Giacomo Leopardi*.

tola a Carlo Pepoli" (1826). The later group embraces the second set of idylls ("i grandi idilli", 1828-1830), the impassioned lyrics (1831-1833) and the philosophical poems (1834-1837).¹²

The poetry composed by Leopardi between 1816 and 1823 reflects the philosophical studies that are found in the "Zibaldone;" studies resulting as has been seen, in a glorification of nature and a depreciation of civilization. These theories, joined to his feeble health, impel him to write in a pessimistic strain, and to look back with regret to the only world that he knows and loves—the ancient world. His original genius alone makes of him a truly modern poet. No matter under what form he chooses to clothe his ideas, whether he makes Brutus or Sappho his mouthpiece, he is expressing the despair and world-weariness of a nineteenth century pessimist.

When Leopardi published his first ten *canzoni* in 1825, he wrote a preamble in which he delivered his own opinion of his work.¹³ The sum and substance of the philosophy conveyed by these poems is there indicated by him as follows: "All is vain in the world except grief; grief is better than tedium; our life is good for nothing else than to despise itself; the necessity of an evil consoles common minds for that evil, but not great minds; everything is a mystery in the universe, except our unhappiness."

Before discussing the romantic or non-romantic tendencies of the earlier poems, it will be well perhaps to glance at the later ones, in order that a comprehensive outlook may be obtained over the whole of Leopardi's poetic work. The most striking change noticeable in all his later productions is the new attitude toward nature and civilization. After the year 1823 comparatively few pages were added to the "Zibaldone". But from them and from other sources it is clear that Leopardi gradually modified his conception of nature, until at length he regarded her as the pitiless foe of mankind. At the same time his estimate of the value of civilization shows a correspondingly great divergence from that of his earlier years. As far as personal feelings are concerned, his pessimism seems deeper than ever before. No other

¹² This classification follows exactly that of Carducci.

¹³ See *Scritti Letterari di Giacomo Leopardi, etc., per cura di Giovanni Mestica*, Firenze, Successori Le Monnier, 1899. Vol. II., pp. 283-285.

conclusion can possibly be drawn from the reading of the majority of his later compositions.

The best insight into his philosophical views toward nature and civilization is to be obtained from a consideration of his last and most profound lyric poem, "La Ginestra". It is well, however, to bear in mind that the development therein traced is not the result of a sudden shift of view-point, but that it is the culmination of a great deal of profound thought.

"La Ginestra" is the poem which, above all others, represents Leopardi's Neapolitan period. It is the deepest and the most philosophical of the *Canti*, and in many ways the most important. It represents the final phase of the author's thought. The late poems all evince an ever increasing horror at the remorseless cruelty of the power of nature that had formerly been so adored. "La Ginestra" is the final expression of dismay, an outcry against the ruthless destructiveness of nature. Living beside Mount Vesuvius, Leopardi could see and imagine the desolation wrought by a volcanic eruption. Moved to the bottom of his heart by his reflections, he urges the union of men against the forces of nature, the abandonment of war, the linking of all possible means for opposing natural harshness and cruelty. Human thought, he says, is the one power that has made any headway against the principle of destruction; this it has done by effecting civilization.

In this poem the reader discovers a point of view almost diametrically opposite to that held by Leopardi as a younger man. Thus his philosophy has completely changed since the time when he wrote the "Discorso", in opposition to the extravagance of the romantic school. His artistic ideals do not show a corresponding change. Investigation serves only to confirm what Leopardi hoped and expected in early life. His literary career represents a gradual advance toward the classical perfection to which he aspired, and which he thought was to be found above all in the works of the ancients.

With this brief review of the poems of Leopardi in mind, we may notice some of his traits that can be called distinctly romantic. Without trying to pick out inconsequential minutiae, we can at once point to the deification of the natural state of humanity, contempt for material progress, strong individualism

and subjectivity, and the discontent that has often been referred to in critical works under the name of "mal de siècle" or "doglia mondiale."

The fact that at once forces itself upon the attention of the student of Leopardi is that the romantic tendencies just enumerated are all connected with the poet's philosophy of life, and not with his artistic theories. Furthermore, some of these tendencies inclined to become less prominent and even to pass entirely away, or to be replaced by opposite sentiments, as the poet grew older. He retained, however, his personal discontent with his surroundings, and his individuality, as long as he lived. We may say with justice that characteristics such as love of nature, defiance of environment, general unhappiness, and strong expression of personality were shared by Leopardi with prominent members of the romantic movement. Tinged with romanticism also is his attitude toward love, which he seemed to consider the sole comfort of man, and the last of the great illusions. But no treatment of these themes could be less romantic, in the ordinary sense of the word, than that of Leopardi. And the more experienced he became, the more severely classical did his poems show themselves to be.

Passing to Leopardi's own attitude toward romanticism, we see that he considered the quality of individuality distinctly classical. He believed most firmly that every author should write for his own time, that is to say, he should treat matters of contemporary interest. In this way only, he felt that the classics could be truly imitated. Therefore, the very qualities that may be picked out as romantic are the ones that Leopardi felt to constitute the genuine following of his great models. It is almost useless to say that he misunderstood the better side of romanticism. But his sincerity in attributing his individuality to classical influence and to long study is not to be doubted. His own words on this subject are as follows:

"To my mind, there is nothing that Italy can hope for until she has books suited to the times, read and understood by the reading public, and which go from one end to the other of that public; a thing that is as common among foreigners as it is unknown in Italy. And I think that the recent example of other nations shows us clearly what power really national books have

in this century, to awaken the dormant minds of a people and to produce great events. But to complete our troubles, there has arisen, from the seventeenth century on, a wall between the learned class and the people, a wall that is becoming constantly higher, and which is unknown in the other nations. And while we love the classics so much, we are unwilling to see that all the Greek, all the Latin and all the ancient Italian classical writers wrote for their own time, and according to the needs, desires, customs, and especially the knowledge and intelligence of their compatriots and contemporaries. And as they would not have been classic if they had acted otherwise, so we shall never be so, if we do not imitate them in this, which is substantial and necessary, more than in a hundred other trifles to which we devote our principal study.'"¹⁴

There is no reason found in this study of Leopardi's personal attitude toward romanticism to change the commonly accepted opinion of his general relation toward the romantic school. The most that can be done is to bring his position into better relief and to point out what he actually said and thought. The conclusion seems inevitable that no man of similar feelings and intellect, living at such a time, could have been more unsympathetic toward the movements advocated by his contemporaries. On the other hand, his very hostility illustrates that no man of his genius could escape what was really profound and valuable in the intellectual life of the times.

In conclusion, it seems established that Leopardi, in addition to being an accomplished scholar and a poet, was a profound and original thinker. For this reason the subject matter of his poems is intensely modern. Such a man could not imitate antiquity to the extent of resigning his philosophical convictions. It is natural then that he should approach and even exemplify many phases of thought found among poets of the romantic movement. But his attacks upon romanticism were directed against artificiality, extravagance and poor taste, and not against love of nature or bold originality of thought. In fact he esteemed these last qualities as characteristic of ancient and not of modern literature. His ideal of poetical composition was the treatment of modern subjects in the spirit of antiquity.

¹⁴ *Epistolario*, Vol. I, pp. 201-202.

II

GIACOMO LEOPARDI AND CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

The union in individuals of the qualities of scholar and of literary artist has been inevitable in every country that has brought to light a considerable body of literature. This union has perhaps been more evident in Italy than in any other country. From the dawn of Italian letters, not only have many prominent authors shown a natural fondness and aptitude for scholarship, but they have actually distinguished themselves in research work as such, and more particularly in classical scholarship. That an original genius should be attracted by Greek and Roman literature and should be inspired to greater efforts by his observation of the masterpieces of antiquity is too natural and of too common occurrence to call for comment. When a Petrarch or a Politian exhibits an intimate acquaintance with ancient standards of beauty we cannot say that we are surprised. But when we find the same men taking a notable place among those who may distinctly be called scholars we are confronted by an interesting and suggestive situation.

The conception of antiquity gained by the man of talent, by the man who is himself able to add materially to the artistic treasures of the world, cannot fail to reveal new and valuable points of view. When a minute knowledge of the civilization of olden times is added to the sympathetic imagination of the creative genius the results are well worth consideration even by the closest student of the classics.

Among the great men of Italy who have devoted themselves to careful study of the ancient world Giacomo Leopardi holds no lowly position. Nothing need be written here in proof of his honorable place in the history of Italian letters. Whether he was or was not the greatest poet of modern Italy does not matter; the fact remains that his reputation as one of the great poets of modern Italy is unassailable.

The details of Leopardi's boyhood studies and of the price he had to pay for unfaltering devotion to classic lore have been set forth in his own writings and in those of his biographers and critics. At the age of eleven years he may be said to have begun the work that was soon to engross him so completely. Four years later (in 1813) he began the study of Greek and the composition of the ponderous works of erudition that are listed among his philological writings. He delves among the obscure productions of the least attractive periods of the ancient world, turning now to Hesychius of Miletus, now to Porphyry, now to the church fathers, the writers of ecclesiastical history, and the rhetoricians of the second century A. D. Inflamed by desire for fame, he is diverted from all boyish amusements and from the study of the beautiful to plunge into abstruse research that will make him a man of note in the learned world. He is so eager in his efforts that he leaves one huge undertaking unfinished in order to start another, thinking always that he will later find time and means to complete his suspended work.

These philological attempts of the poet's youthful days have rightly been described as disproportioned, pedantic, unfit for publication. The truth could hardly be otherwise. Composed with startling speed by a boyish recluse depending almost entirely upon his own efforts, they stand as a monument to industry and as an emblem of the wrecking of their author's health and hopes of happiness.

It might justly be argued that these heroic efforts of Leopardi's boyhood demonstrate that he might have achieved supreme excellence as an investigator of antiquity. The interesting "*Saggio sopra gli Errori popolari degli antichi*" and the later productions, of which the best example is the "*Eusebius*", mark their author's ambition and ability to become a scholar of the highest type. Seriousness of purpose and willingness to toil are everywhere apparent, and are always supported by a brilliant though necessarily immature mentality. If his constitution had not broken down under the strain, he might have gained fame in the path that he had marked out for himself. It is hardly to be supposed that scientific research could ever have monopolized an imaginative mind like Leopardi's. We can only conjecture what re-

lation would have persisted in later years between scholarship and literature. But we cannot harbor a doubt that classical scholarship lost a talented and sincere worker when physical disability compelled the young Leopardi to curtail his beloved labors.

If we are to gain any benefits from a consideration of Leopardi's relation to antiquity, we must look further. The labors of his early youth demonstrate a passionate eagerness to ransack the storehouse of the ancient world, and this work reveals possibilities that were never realized. The history of scholarship is full of the names of men who have equalled or closely approached the industrious application of Leopardi. Moreover, these men continued their efforts to the period of maturity and set a firm foundation for their fame. The young Italian poet's philological output lacks the substance that experience would have given it. If we had no further means of judging him, we should have to liken his accomplishment to a luxuriant plant suddenly checked in its growth.

In writing of his life Leopardi compared it with the history of the world. To him his youth seemed akin to the vigor and tumult of antiquity, his later years to the disillusionment and weariness of modern civilization.¹ The chief analogy between his early years and the ancient world lay in the insatiable thirst for glory that led him to devote every possible moment during several years to the acquirement of learning. It is somewhat ironical to decide now virtually to pass over this period of unremitting application in an endeavor to form an idea of Leopardi's conception of antiquity. Nevertheless there are documents of considerably greater value than the philological works proper. Most important of all is the "Zibaldone"; other sources of information are the approved prose and poetry, the "Epistolario", the translations and a heterogeneous mass of desultory notes and sketches. As the main object of inquiry is to be found in the "Zibaldone", we must pass the other documents in review as quickly as possible.

The "Canti" and "Prose Morali" must be regarded as the expression of their author's thoughts and emotions and neces-

¹ *Pensieri di Varia Filosofia e di Bella Letteratura*, Vol. I, pp. 249-251.

sarily therefore as the product of the nineteenth century, although in the absence of other evidence they could lead us to the conclusion that Leopardi was intimately acquainted with Greece and with Rome. But the artistic output of an original genius baffles the investigator who would seek the author's conception of another civilization. Poems and essays that embody the philosophical and imaginative conceptions of their author are poor material for any conclusions regarding his appreciation of the life of peoples that died centuries before his time.

Leopardi himself tells us that his poems are not to be regarded as imitations of any one author.² It would be unjust to call them classical and perhaps still more unjust to call them romantic. They are the product of long study and much thought. In general we trace the effort to reach the poet's own ideal of his art—the treatment of modern subjects in the form of the best classical poets. The attainment of this aim indicates a thorough mastery of and sympathy with Greek and Roman literature. But definite ideas are hard to discover. Actual borrowing from the classics is very subtle, showing itself only in the general framing of the poems. Leopardi strives to reproduce the vague and indefinite beauty that he admired so much in Vergil and in other ancients. He allows himself to use the suggestive but inaccurate adjectives so dear to the Latin poets. Strictly in accordance with his theory of grace and elegance he seeks the unusual, while avoiding obscurity.

Valuable hints may be gleaned from many of the individual poems and notably from the patriotic *canzoni*. But when we find that the "Bruto Minore" describes Leopardi's own attitude toward fate and that "Alla Primavera o delle Favole Antiche" embodies his regret at the loss of the illusions of youth we cannot hope to discover in such material any scientific ideas on ancient civilization. This is far from arousing regret, because it emphasizes the original character of Leopardi's mind and shows us that a master of philology, though able to use his learning in the proper place, knew when not to overburden art with erudition.

Considering the "Operette Morali" as a whole, we can see that

² See *Scritti Letterari di Giacomo Leopardi, etc., per cura di Giovanni Mestica*, Firenze, Successori Le Monnier, 1899. Vol. II, pp. 283-285.

in part they represent Leopardi's intention to write a series of Lucianic dialogues involving serious subjects of modern life.² Not all of his moral works can be called Lucianic, but some are very close to the dialogues of the Greek satirist. Throughout these productions there runs an undercurrent of irony that reminds us now of Lucian, now of the more quiet art of Plato. Leopardi's seriousness of purpose is clearer than Lucian's, who seems often to be writing satire for satire's sake. On the contrary, Leopardi has a philosophy of pessimism to proclaim. He uses fantastic settings, invention, humor and irony in order to express as artistically as he may his theories of gloom. He employs freely his great erudition, introducing reference after reference to bring into stronger relief the force of his arguments. In his choice of setting he is entirely impartial, taking his outline from whatever source pleases him.

The principal use of the artistic poetry and prose in the particular investigation of their author's knowledge of antiquity is to illustrate and round out his consummate mastery of ancient civilization. Other and clearer documents remain to be discussed.

Leopardi never finished a long and important translation. He meditated a rendering of the whole of Plato, but the idea was abandoned after long reflection. Doubtless he would have found it next to impossible to accomplish a work of that nature. Illness made him discontented with long-continued and exhausting tasks. He found it extremely hard to complete his edition of Petrarch, which he was bound by promise to do,

He was constantly making plans for works to be composed after the recovery of his health. Among these intended productions were translations of such celebrated Greek authors as Thucydides, Aristophanes, and Euripides.

As he never carried out any of his more ambitious schemes for translations, we must be satisfied with the short pieces that we have. They fall naturally into two classes, one literary and the other philosophical. The literary translations were composed between 1815 and 1817, and include Moschus, the "Batracomyomachia", the "Moretum" of the *Appendix Vergiliana*, the first

² For this intention, cf. *Scritti Letterari*, Vol. II, pp. 266-267.

canto of the "Aeneid", the second book of the "Odyssey", the Triopean inscriptions and a passage from Hesiod's "Theogony". These efforts, although marred by the faults of youth and inexperience, indicate the direction of their author's ideas. He had broken away from his strict adherence to scholarly research at the call of his literary aspirations. Insignificant in themselves, they point out the union between erudition and creative genius that forms the soul of Leopardi's conception of the ancient world.

The philosophical translations are separated from the first group by an interval of about five years. They range from 1822 to 1827, and include the satire of Semonides on women, some works of Isocrates, the "Manual" of Epictetus, Prodicus's "Fable of Hercules" in the "Memorabilia", an oration of Gemistus Pletho, and various fragments. They are nearly all grouped around the "Operette Morali", and illustrate the trend of Leopardi's mind toward speculation and morals.

The translations of this second period are much superior to those of the first. It is hard to compare the poetry of Semonides with that of Homer, and therefore we cannot come to any sound conclusions respecting the translator's improvement in turning Greek poetry into Italian verse. But it is safe to say that the prose versions of later years are distinctly better as artistic compositions than the poetical works of the earlier period. Leopardi's ability to produce smooth, careful translations of Greek philosophers and moralists is evidence of literary skill and of a wide interest in and mastery of another branch of ancient knowledge.

It may be noted that nearly all of Leopardi's translations are from the Greek. This is significant in showing where his preference lay.

The "Epistolario" of Leopardi, embracing as it does a great number of letters written from the year 1816 to the time of the poet's death, is virtually a commentary on his life. The early letters demonstrate the enthusiasm for research that wrecked his health. His correspondence of the years 1817 and 1818 shows the same desire for scholarly achievement, tempered by a literary awakening and by the realization of failure in physical ability to toil. Any one reading the effusions of his youth will detect at

once an impetuosity and a confidence in his own powers that promise the attainment of a high place in the annals of Italian literature and scholarship. Particularly is this noticeable in the delight and pride taken by the boy on receiving recognition from such men as Monti, Mai and Giordani. The letters exchanged by Leopardi and Giordani were the means of bringing about a firm and lasting friendship between the two men. The importance to Leopardi of this friendship can hardly be overestimated. To have as a friend one of the great literary men of Italy, to be able to disclose all his own lofty aspirations, to discuss the classics and the subjects that he loved with a man of learning and of feeling—all this awoke a fiery enthusiasm in the boy's heart. He looked forward eagerly to the achievement of renown, and he hoped that his health would soon allow him to resume his work. Giordani was astonished at the precocious genius of his youthful correspondent. He saw in him the foundations for a "perfect Italian writer".⁴ He also understood the danger threatening Leopardi from overwork,—a danger that he strove earnestly though unsuccessfully to avert.

After the year 1818 Leopardi's letters with few exceptions reflect the sadness and hopelessness of his life. Interest in the classics can no longer be paramount with him. He writes at times on Latin and Greek studies, earning the friendship and admiration of Niebuhr, Bunsen, De Sinner and others. New plans for work on ancient subjects are constantly filling his mind, and sometimes the work is begun, but he is incapable of completing a laborious task to his own satisfaction. Protests that he will never undertake another investigation of antiquity are followed by the resumption of ambition until, in 1836, he cries out in despair: "Sooner will the rivers return to the springs than I recover the vigor necessary for philological studies."⁵

Although the letters of Leopardi often disclose his ideals and ambitions, they are generally lacking in the presentation of anything like definite views on classical subjects. The eagerness of his youth and his later aversion to what he considered pedantry are both apparent. But very few of the compositions con-

⁴ The '*perfetto scrittore italiano*', in whose development Giordani was much interested.

⁵ Cf. *Epistolario*, III, p. 30.

tained in the "Epistolario" were meant for publication; nearly all are genuine letters written to relatives and friends. Therefore they must not be expected to furnish the best of material for criticism of their author's insight into ancient civilization. As a matter of fact they contain more evidence than might be anticipated. But everything in them is overshadowed by the sorrow of a great mind that finds itself unable to carry out its cherished aims.

Among the miscellaneous papers left by Leopardi are a number of valuable indications of his scholarly interests. We are confronted again and again by a bewildering series of stupendous works to be undertaken by the poet upon his physical recovery.⁶ The majority of these sketches and plans do not deal directly with classical antiquity. This is only another proof that Leopardi was too original a genius and too well imbued with the fact of his existence in a modern world to devote all his attention or even the greater part of it to extinct phases of human life. But many of his intended productions do propose to deal with Greece or with Rome, and no doubt can be entertained that a number of his works on modern subjects would have been interspersed with references to the antiquity that he devotedly admired.

Since the conception of antiquity contained in the brief notes left by Leopardi is developed further and presented more clearly in the huge mass of material that he called the "Zibaldone", we may proceed directly to that source. The "Zibaldone" remained for many years in Naples, first in the hands of the poet's friend Antonio Ranieri and afterward in the hands of Ranieri's heirs. It was not until 1898 that its publication was undertaken under the title "Pensieri di Varia Filosofia e di Bella Letteratura".⁷ The following description of it is taken from the report of the commission appointed by the Italian government to investigate the work:

It is a mass of some 4526 pages, all written in the hand of

⁶ Cf. especially a long list of varied titles in the *Scritti Vari Inediti di Giacomo Leopardi dalle carte napoletane*, Firenze, Successori Le Monnier, 1910, pp. 390-402; other lists and plans are found in the *Zibaldone* and elsewhere.

⁷ Firenze, Successori Le Monnier, 1898-1907.

the author. These pages contain a great number of thoughts, notes, records, conversations and discussions of the illustrious youth with himself on his soul and his life; comments on his reading and reflections on philosophy, literature, politics; on man, on the nations, on the universe; material for a wider and more varied consideration than is found in the moral prose; free and unrestrained considerations proper to a man who was writing from day to day for himself and not for others. Nearly every article of this organic encyclopedia is marked by the year, the month and the day on which it was written, and the whole extends from July, 1817, to the fourth of December, 1832; but the greater part was composed between 1817 and 1827.⁸

The contents of the "Zibaldone" may be divided into three parts, namely, philological, literary-aesthetic, and philosophical. The first division clearly contains the elements of a work on the chief languages of southern Europe. In the notes we can see the germs of an etymological study of the connection between the Romance languages and vulgar Latin and of the relation between Latin and Greek. There are also collections of examples sufficient for articles on continuative verbs, diminutives, etc. Moreover, the author is manifestly contemplating discussion of the qualifications of the various languages for literary expression.

It is not so easy to find a general trend in the literary-aesthetic observations. What is evident is a decided preference of classical to romantic literature and of lyric and epic poetry to the drama. Above all is remarked the importance attached by Leopardi to style. It is hard to formulate any definite theory of aesthetics from the scattered notes at our disposal. In general we find a leaning toward the simple and natural, a depreciation of the involved and ornate.

The "Zibaldone" offers a system of philosophy developed at least as early as 1821. Later entries show an abandonment in part of this system. Interest in morals is evident, and the idea of a thorough comparison of ancient and modern civilizations may easily be traced.

Leopardi's philological ideas, though very ingenious, cannot detain us here. They show us that he was a man who might have achieved distinction in scholarly research, but they are not car-

⁸ For a brief history of the Neapolitan mss., see preface to above work, pp. V-XIII.

ried far enough to produce really valuable results. In one form of linguistic investigation, however, Leopardi has left us some notably interesting comments. This is in the criticism of different languages as mediums of expression.

Any language, he says, is free and adaptable until it is settled by literary, parliamentary, and other usages. Thereafter its richness can clearly be estimated. For centuries Greek continued to add to its richness by natural growth, while it resisted the corruption attendant upon a decadent literature by means of its elasticity. The Greeks were comparatively ignorant of Latin, which they seldom quoted, but the Romans were often bilingual. Though many Roman authors wrote in Greek, few Greeks wrote in Latin. The natives of western Europe tended to use Latin as their literary language. Greek, however, was used almost universally in eastern Europe and in Asia despite the attempts of the Romans to introduce their speech in all their provinces. No stronger proof can be given of the superior tenacity of Greek. The Bible and Josephus's history were written in Greek in order to appeal to a wide circle of readers. Marcus Aurelius wrote his "Meditations" in Greek probably because he deemed it better adapted to philosophical speculation. The great influence of Attic models in Rome is emphasized by the use of Greek titles for certain works of the most famous Latin authors; for instance, the "Georgics", and the "Metamorphoses". For centuries and even down to the Renaissance the Greeks preserved the memory of their literature.⁹

The extraordinary tenacity of Greek is to be explained only by its richness, naturalness and adaptability. It had been the language of great authors, and their successors refused to give it up. If it had been the medium used in medieval Europe the modern tongues would have had much more difficulty in making headway.

Language and civilization go hand in hand. When civilization grows weak language must decay. The extraordinary tenacity of Greek had as a background the strength of Hellenic civilization. The language of Athens remained pure for centuries, and only in very late authors did barbarisms begin to appear. Even to-day modern Greek is much closer to the classical language than Italian is to Latin.¹⁰

Differences in the inherent character of a speech correspond

⁹ Cf. *Pensieri di Varia Filosofia e di Bella Letteratura*, Vol. IV, pp. 49-52; II, 295-296; II, 328-330; IV, 86-88; IV, 85-86; II, 326-338, etc.

¹⁰ Cf. *Pensieri, etc.*, IV, 382-385; V, 20-21; IV, 435-437.

to differences in pronunciation. Hence a universal spoken language would be impossible. Such a medium would be inconceivably arid and mathematical. The sound would soon vary in different places. The ancient languages were entirely opposed to the ideal of a universal medium. They were capable of great variety, because the whole ancient world had not been deeply affected by a leveling process; singularity in any field was admired."

From these statements and from others which are to be found in the "Zibaldone" an idea may be gained of the profundity of Leopardi's observations on language. If he had been able to complete, collect and publish his notes, his contribution to linguistic study could not have failed to be very valuable. His attitude toward the Greek language is always one of the highest admiration. Greek seemed to him to have every virtue,—the ability to form compounds, imaginative beauty, clearness, supreme qualifications for scientific expression, and usefulness as a medium for translation. Although his opinion of Latin was high, he considered it inferior to Greek and (in some ways) to certain modern languages.

Turning from these matters to literary and artistic criticism, the reader of the "Zibaldone" finds many theories of interest. The following opinions on ancient style, on Greek originality, on naturalness, on rules of art, on the ancient conception of grief and on the "Iliad" are presented. Many other statements equally striking might be selected in their place:

Ancient style, Leopardi maintains, is far more varied than modern style. Nearly all writers of to-day are careless except the French, whose language does not allow variety.¹² Moderns therefore cannot reproduce ancient style by means of translation. The art of writing and speaking belongs to the ancients as exclusively as that of thinking belongs to the modern world. The men of antiquity not only devoted to the art of style an infinitely greater amount of study than we give to it; they not only understood a thousand secrets whose existence we do not even suspect or which we comprehend with difficulty when explained by Cicero or Quintilian; not only was ancient style incomparably wider, richer, more varied, more accurate and more detailed

¹¹ *Pensieri, etc.*, VI, 244-248.

¹² *Pensieri, etc.*, V, 74-76.

than ours; but it was the principal and almost the solitary study of the Greeks and Romans who aspired to the name of author.¹³ The least of the ancient stylists is superior to the moderns, because his medium is superior.

Greek literature was the only one known for many years; hence it evinced creative power and tenacity. During the centuries from Homer to Demosthenes there was noticeable not the slightest tendency to lose originality. In a later age the influence of Greek literature upon the Romans was tremendous, exceeding even French influence in Italy.¹⁴

Care must be taken to attribute to nature the beautiful in art. Probably Homer and his contemporaries did not realize their own naturalness and simplicity, and considered themselves daring in the use of epithets. The lack of simplicity probably hindered the early development of Greek prose. Later the Greeks achieved a simplicity unrivalled by any other people; their literature by its naturalness appealed more than any other to the masses. On the other hand, the artificiality of Latin literature made it the one most remote from the common people. The Greek language and literature, long without competition, were able to remain pure for centuries. No other writer of any age has equalled Xenophon in simpleness and ease of style. He and other Greek authors of the best periods of the language are quite free from affectation. Especially striking is the fact that modern efforts to reproduce such simplicity and unaffectedness always fail because of conscious exertion to attain their end; whereas the ancient models are perfectly natural. Greek prose is marked by dignity and purity and by its existence as a medium distinct from poetry. In contrast to this, there is little to distinguish French prose from French poetry.¹⁵

We find Leopardi declaring that it is absurd to suppose that set rules can be formulated for poetry or for any other art.

There are too many variations in individuals and in conditions to allow the existence of any general canon of art. Frequently rules are injurious to originality. Homer had no conception of a standard to be followed, and therefore he allowed himself to be inconsistent. Since he was the model for later poets, rules based upon his productions were bound to be uncertain. For this reason Greek poetry is full of irregularities, while Latin poetry is more or less consistent. By this quality Latin poetry is made artificial in comparison with that of the Greeks and Italians. The great Greek and Italian classics were written before the

¹³ *Pensieri, etc.*, V, 407-408.

¹⁴ *Pensieri, etc.*, IV, 321-322, 333.

¹⁵ *Pensieri, etc.*, I, 426-427.

formation of rules, while the Latin masterpieces had models to be imitated.¹⁶

In a treatment of grief Leopardi holds that the woe expressed by ancient art is desperate and sublime. Having no sense of resignation in the face of sorrow, and finding no sweetness in grief, the ancient mind despaired when confronted with great misfortune. This is illustrated by the statues of Laocoon and of Niobe and by the pathetic episodes of Homer.¹⁷

Leopardi's admiration for Homer is evident at every turn. Among many other tributes he says:

The "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" are the longest of European epics, yet the most forceful and the richest from beginning to end. The plan of the "Iliad" combines the national feeling necessary in an epic with the sympathy essential to all works of art. In the "Iliad" sympathy is felt with Hector, the enemy of Greece. The "Aeneid", "Jerusalem Delivered" and the "Lusiad" may surpass it in details, but they are much inferior in the union of conflicting interests and in general scope. The "Iliad" is far more attractive than any other epic to a reader of today. Homer exemplifies all the vagueness of beauty. His very person is wrapped in obscurity. His heroes, Achilles and Hector, are governed by nature, while Godfrey, Rinaldo and Aeneas submit to reason. The appeal of the "Iliad" is universal; its interest never lags; it maintains a high level throughout. The "Aeneid", the "Jerusalem Delivered", and even the "Odyssey", become duller as they approach the end.¹⁸

The careful reader of the "Zibaldone" will find entry after entry embodying Leopardi's thoughts on ancient art. The examples just given might be amplified, and many more might easily be found to illustrate the deep study that the poet gave to aesthetic matters. Even more remarkable in insight and profundity are his historical and philosophical observations. These occupy a very large part of the "Zibaldone", and such of them as are here presented must be regarded only as a few specimens chosen from an almost boundless supply:

According to Leopardi one of the principal factors in the preservation of noble aims among the men of antiquity was the high value set upon bodily vigor.

¹⁶ *Pensieri, etc.*, I, 380-381; I, 390.

¹⁷ *Pensieri, etc.*, I, 188-190.

¹⁸ *Pensieri, etc.*, V, 110-115; V, 182-322; VI, 48-64; VI, 162-163; VI, 347.

In Greece and in Rome physical exercise developed courage and the imaginative faculties rather than the intellect. The Greek sports and amusements contributed more to this end than those of the Romans, because they were more natural and held in higher esteem. In Rome public exhibitions were largely conducted by slaves, the citizens being too often mere spectators. With the vanishing of great illusions came the cessation of noble actions. Philosophers, who understand thoroughly the uselessness of great actions (as far as pure reason is concerned), are inclined to be cowardly and to submit readily to tyranny. Philosophy and reason introduce egoism and contempt for the body. Likewise the arts, after a certain stage of civilization has been reached, lead to laziness and to the strengthening of despotism. In ancient times the arts acted as incentives to effort, and ancient philosophers urgently advocated the training of the body.¹⁹

Among the great qualities adjudged to the ancients by Leopardi are firmness, constancy, force and magnanimity.

These very attributes, he says, made them adopt fixed aims and purposes, and prevented them from adjusting themselves to circumstances. Similarly all men with a great aim in life are unable to adjust themselves to conditions about them.

The whole tendency of modern civilization is to equalize manners and customs in individuals and to promote a feeling of universal love. This leads to a certain similarity in external traits, but it is ruinous to national feeling and unity. In antiquity individuals differed in everyday manners and customs, but they were united in patriotic inspiration and in racial solidarity. The Greeks were more remarkable than the Romans for national exclusiveness. A feeling of their own superiority made them despise other races. The Romans tried to assimilate the valuable qualities found in other peoples.²⁰

Leopardi admits that the ancient states were imperfect, but he claims that they gave to man more possibility of happiness than is offered by modern civilization.

The perfection of the human race by reason is impossible. The only effect of reason is to rob man of his vigor and happiness. Among the Greeks and the Romans force was equivalent to virtue. For a long time philosophy was unable to overturn this opinion, and even some of the wisest men of Rome—Cato, Cicero, Tacitus—favored forceful action. A complete philosopher could not give rise to activity. In the early days of Rome virtue was dependent upon nature. In later times only men partly perfected

¹⁹ *Pensieri, etc.*, I, 394; I, 344.

²⁰ *Pensieri, etc.*, I, 254-257.

in reason, like the Gracchi and Brutus, retained their natural virtue and vigor. The perfection of philosophy is nothing but egoism.²¹

As time went on Leopardi became more and more interested in matters of practical morality. In an entry written in 1826 he tells us that he is contemplating the writing of a comparison between the ancient and the modern worlds with respect to morals.²²

This great interest in morals is of course reflected in the "Op-erette Morali". It is evident also from other sources and particularly from that part of the "Zibaldone" written in the year 1822 and later. In the earlier portion of the "Zibaldone" there is more variety of subject matter, and in fact it is only after 1823 that any very considerable restriction is apparent. Special consideration of morals includes a great number of comments upon ancient and modern characteristics, of which the following may serve as examples:

The sentiment of honor was of very general moment in the ancient world, and its maintenance always brought glory. Now it is an individual matter, likely at times to reduce its possessor to infamy.²³

In the men of antiquity passions were stronger than they are in the citizens of the more civilized countries of today. Grief was felt more keenly, and this might be said of joy, too, did not its very rarity make it peculiarly grateful to the modern man.²⁴

The ancients were pagans and nearer to savagery than we are. Therefore they esteemed practical morality. Influenced by Christianity and by civilization, the moderns devote themselves to theoretical morality.²⁵

To be born great means unhappiness in modern life. In the ancient world it gave rise to glory and contentment. Christianity goes so far as to account misfortune a divine favor.²⁶

Repentance is considered a Christian characteristic, but it was not entirely lacking in ancient systems of morality.²⁷

Examples like these might be multiplied, but enough have been given to show the nature of Leopardi's ideas on the subject of morals.

²¹ *Pensieri, etc.*, II, 401-402; IV, 110-111; II, 39-40; IV, 126; IV, 152.

²² *Pensieri, etc.*, VII, 102; cf. *Scritti Vari*, p. 369.

²³ *Pensieri, etc.*, IV, 230-232.

²⁴ *Pensieri, etc.*, IV, 233-239.

²⁵ *Pensieri, etc.*, IV, 272-273.

²⁶ *Pensieri, etc.*, IV, 313.

²⁷ *Pensieri, etc.*, IV, 188-189.

The "Zibaldone" literally teems with indications of patient study and thought. It is unfortunate that all the energy expended upon these notes had to remain almost wasted. It cannot be doubted that a brilliant series of books on many aspects of ancient civilization would have resulted if Leopardi had been able to carry out his desires. Striking as are the entries in the "Zibaldone", finished works would probably be much more effective by way both of artistic presentation and of scholarship. The youthful comments on antiquity discovered in the "Zibaldone" betray a tendency to overvalue ancient civilization. We may assume that Leopardi would have modified this attitude without abatement of his powers of observation.

There are often evident in the critical judgments and in the theories of Leopardi an insight and a power of generalization and a sympathetic imagination which remind the reader that he is in the presence of a philosopher and a poet. It is to the poetical faculty that the greater part of the multifarious comments and opinions of the "Zibaldone" must be attributed. Leopardi is expressing his love and admiration for antiquity, and although he goes to extremes in his praises, there is never any doubt as to his sincerity. Fortunately his is not ignorant comment. His fondness for Greece and Rome is supported by a solid knowledge of the subjects he discusses. His bias in favor of antiquity is to be imputed not to insufficient information, but to deep convictions based upon much study and thought.

The brilliancy of Leopardi's observations serves to present many aspects of the ancient world in a most striking way. It goes without saying that the views of a poet on scholarly subjects (especially when the poet is trained as a specialist in those subjects) offer much more than a passing interest. The importance to science of a poetical point of view has been well presented by H. T. Buckle, who says:

"There is, in poetry, a divine and prophetic power, and an insight into the turn and aspect of things, which, if properly used, would make it the ally of science instead of the enemy. By the poet, nature is contemplated on the side of the emotions; by the man of science, on the side of the understanding. But the emotions are as much a part of us as the understanding; they are as truthful; they are as likely to be right. Though

their view is different, it is not capricious. They obey fixed laws; they follow an orderly and uniform course; they run in sequences; they have their logic and method of inference. Poetry, therefore, is a part of philosophy, simply because the emotions are a part of the mind. If the man of science despises their teaching, so much the worse for him.' ²²³

²² *History of Civilization in England*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 395.

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